



Testimony  
Betsy Gara  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Council of Small Towns  
Before the GAE Committee  
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The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), which represents 115 towns throughout Connecticut, appreciates the opportunity to comment regarding **SB-1051, AN ACT STRENGTHENING CONNECTICUT'S ELECTIONS.**

COST supports efforts to look for ways to strengthen Connecticut's election laws to address inefficiencies and protect the integrity of the process.

COST's member towns are proud of their efforts to ensure that elections run smoothly. Preparations are thorough, staffing is appropriate, results are reported in a timely fashion and are accurate, recounts are executed with professionalism and in accordance with established oversight protocols, and the community is well informed during all steps of the election process.

Accordingly, many communities believe that they are well-served under the current process. However, some towns have experienced issues relating to registrars that they are unable to address under the existing statutory framework. Some of these issues are attributed to tension between the registrars who represent different political parties. Other issues stem from the lack of supervisory authority over the registrars. Should a registrar perform poorly in any aspect of his/her work, there is virtually no recourse in place for local action.

Other towns have expressed concern that registrars may not have sufficient knowledge of election laws, procedures, etc. to perform the duties effectively and efficiently. This is certainly an area that can be addressed to ensure the integrity and efficiency of the election process.

Municipal officials also point out that some issues have arisen after registrars were granted greater authority in the election process. Public Act 11-173 transferred several election-related duties from town clerks to registrars of voters. Although the changes were intended to conform the law to common practices, it served to elevate the role of the registrars and limit the authority of the town clerk to manage the administration of



the election laws. For example, the Act requires registrars of voters, instead of town clerks, to (1) submit sample ballots to the secretary of the state for approval and provide them to each polling place and (2) provide ballots for an adjourned primary resulting from a tie vote.

COST therefore supports efforts to: 1) Provide greater oversight of registrars of voters, including a mechanism to ensure that issues relating to the performance of the registrars may be addressed at the local level; 2) Enhance the training and certification requirements to ensure that registrars of voters have the requisite skills needed to perform the functions of the position; and 3) Restore the town clerk's authority to administer election laws.

In addition, COST provides the following comments specific to certain provisions in the bill:

Section 1 of the bill authorizes the "appointment" of the registrar of voters by the legislative body of each town in consultation with the municipal clerk. The legislative body in many small towns is the Town Meeting. There is no process for a Town meeting to "appoint" a registrar because motions must be approved by a majority of those present, which is, in effect, an election. It is also unclear how a town meeting would make this appointment in consultation with the municipal clerk.

In 121 towns, the municipal clerk is elected in a general election and represents a particular political party. It is unclear, then, how the provisions of the bill will address the need to insulate the registrar from political pressure. Moreover, the bill imposes significant new obligations on the town clerk to assume the responsibilities of the position in the event of the registrar's absence, which may not be feasible given the other duties of the clerk's position.

COST is also concerned that the proposal may result in increased costs to municipalities related to registrars of voters. We therefore urge lawmakers to carefully consider the impact of the proposal on municipal budgets to determine if this bill will impose an unfunded mandate on towns and cities.

*COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns.*